

Opening Statement of Howard P. “Buck” McKeon (R-CA)
Chairman, Education & the Workforce Committee
Markup of the *Senior Independence Act* of 2006

May 17, 2006

Good morning, and I thank my colleagues for joining me today as we consider the *Senior Independence Act* of 2006, legislation to renew and strengthen programs of the Older Americans Act.

I’d especially like to extend a warm welcome and my gratitude to the Select Education Subcommittee Chairman, Mr. Tiberi, and the subcommittee’s ranking Democrat, Mr. Hinojosa, for making this bipartisan bill a reality. During this contentious political season, it is rare to find the type of bipartisan cooperation we’ve found during this reauthorization process, and Mr. Tiberi and Mr. Hinojosa have taken the lead in making it so.

Initially established to govern a wide array of social services for aging Americans, the Older Americans Act has transformed into the first stop for older Americans to identify home- and community-based long term care options, as well as programs and services for which they may be eligible.

That’s because today, supporting the needs of older Americans is as important as ever. It is estimated that more than 36 million people in the United States are over the age of 65, making it the fastest growing age group in the country. According to the Census Bureau, by the year 2050, persons over age 65 will reach nearly 90 million and comprise almost a quarter of the total U.S. population. This trend makes a thoughtful reauthorization of the Older Americans Act all the more important.

Because of our aging population, additional reforms are needed to ensure the quality and effectiveness of federal programs aimed at assisting the elderly. The bipartisan *Senior Independence Act* makes those reforms by promoting key principles of President Bush’s Choices for Independence plan, which emphasizes consumer choice, access to reliable information, and health promotion.

Specifically, the *Senior Independence Act* will:

- Promote home- and community-based supports to help older individuals avoid institutional care;
- Strengthen health and nutrition programs;
- Improve educational and volunteer services;
- Increase federal, state, and local coordination; and
- Safeguard employment-based training for older Americans.

The measure before us today aims to make the most of the federal investment in programs to assist older Americans, while ensuring that the growing senior population is served

by the same quality programs established by the 1965 law. It is a good bill worthy of our support.

Before I conclude, I'd like to recognize and thank my colleague from California, Mr. Miller, for his cooperation in keeping this bill bipartisan and strong. I look forward to our discussion and action on the legislation today, and I yield to my friend Mr. Miller for any opening statement he may have.

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